

Making their families official

BY ALAN INGRAM

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John Weatherwax says he and his wife Tracey became foster parents in February 2005 because they "both really love children, and we knew there was the need out there for foster parents."



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About six months later, in August, three young boys — Dominic, Moses and Luc — came into their home as foster children, and the Grand Haven Township couple worked to make them feel like a part of the family, Tracey explained.

While the boys originally called the couple by their first names, Moses, now 4 years old, began calling them "mommy" and "daddy" in the spring of this year. Dominic, 6, soon followed his younger brother.

"It was exciting to hear them call us that for the first time," John said.

Since then, other Weatherwax family members have become known as grandma, grandpa, uncle and aunt to the trio of boys.

On Tuesday, however, the family will be made official. John, Tracey and the three boys will participate in the county's annual Adoption Day at the Fillmore Street Complex in West Olive.

During the event, which will begin at 9 a.m. with Ottawa County Commissioner Roger Rycenga declaring Tuesday as Adoption Day, 12 different adoptions for 19 different children will take place, said county Juvenile Services Director Pat VerDuin.

The adoptions will happen every 15 minutes before either Chief Probate Judge Mark Feyen or Circuit Judge Jon Hulsing, who is participating in the Ottawa County event for the first time since it began in 2004.

More adoptions than ever before will take place during this year's Adoption Day, VerDuin said. Only six to eight adoptions took place during the special day in its first two years.

Families that are expected to conclude the adoption process near Adoption Day are given the option of participating, VerDuin said, adding that she believes one family actually asked to finalize their adoption on Tuesday.

However, the public celebration is not for everyone, VerDuin said.

"For some, adoption is a very private matter, and they chose not to be a part of this very public celebration," she explained.

Dominic, Moses and Luc, the trio that will soon be officially part of the Weatherwax family, will also see a familiar face Tuesday. Their 2-year-old brother, Eli, is also being adopted, but by Park Township resident Denise Hodge.

Eli was separated from his siblings because of his special needs, Hodge explained.

The Weatherwaxes and Hodge, who has given Eli a home since February, plan to maintain the biological bond between the four brothers. While John Weatherwax said the two families have not set regular times to meet, they plan to do so "as often as possible."

A situation like the one that the Weatherwaxes and Hodge hope to accomplish is not common, VerDuin said, as it is unusual for two separate families to decide to bring up siblings in different homes and keep them in contact with each other.

Hodge, however, said she thinks it is "very important" to keep the boys in contact.

As for the Weatherwaxes, they're looking forward to Tuesday and officially becoming a family, Tracey said.

"They're pretty great kids," she said.